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WHY ARE SOME ANIMALS NOCTURNAL?



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While you're fast asleep, some animal species are wide awake. Those animals are nocturnal — active at night and sleeping during the day. Unmask the secrets of these nighttime dwellers with facts from [Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom Protecting the Wild](#) Co-Host [Peter Gros](#).



Get to know nocturnal animals

Nocturnal animals have specialized senses to allow them to survive the night: sensitive hearing, great eyesight and a keen sense of smell. These all allow them to be able to hunt for prey without a lot of light.

Around 70% of mammals are nocturnal, including opossums, raccoons, coyotes, mice and [ferrets](#). Other classes, such as birds and insects, also have nocturnal animals.

One of the most famous nocturnal animals is the owl. Though you may see an owl during the day, they mostly stay hidden in the forest, waiting to come out at dusk to hunt.

"When you see an owl turning and cocking its head, what it's doing is triangulating where the sound is coming from, so that in pitch black, it can drop down to that rustling leaves sound and find something it's going to dine on," Peter said.

An owl's eyes also help it see at night. Many nocturnal animals have larger eyes to let in more light. In addition, owls have a higher ratio of rods to cones in their eyes than humans, meaning their vision is especially suited for nighttime.

"It may be pitch black except for starlight and owls can glean enough light with their super vision to be able to hunt," Peter said.



Nocturnal animals during the day

Nocturnal and diurnal (animals who are awake during the day) have opposite sleep cycles. So, while it's light out, nocturnal animals look for places to rest before their active night. Some nocturnal species, such as ferrets and foxes, go in their burrow or den during the day. Others, such as birds, look for shelter in the trees.

"Many thick trees offer good cover, and birds will roost in them," Peter said. "Most of the flock will pick a nice, thick tree for shelter and to hide from predators, and they all roost in the same spot."

As seasons change and daylight hours increase or decrease, nocturnal animals also adjust.

"They have an internal clock that adjusts as the temperature changes and the daylight hours change," Peter said.



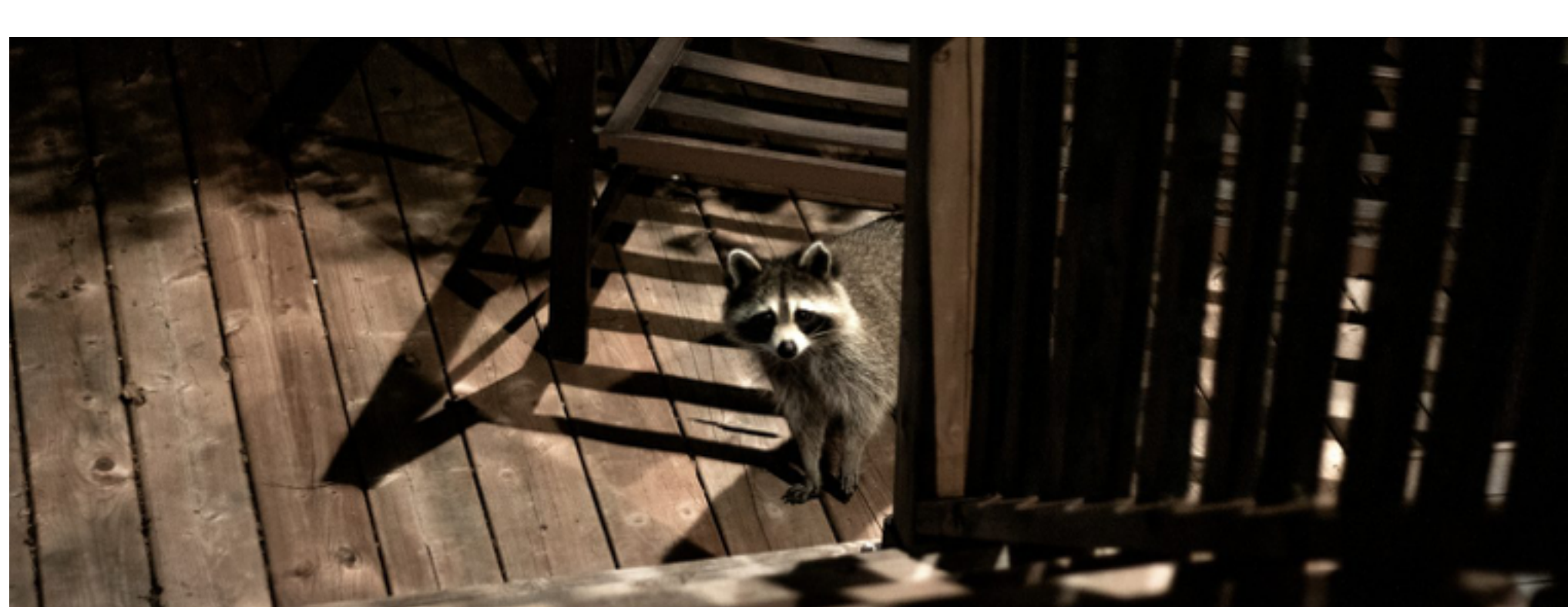
How zoos care for nocturnal animals

Nocturnal animals in [zoos](#) are in a unique position. By their nature, zoos are daytime facilities, but they do a great job of adapting for nocturnal animals. One way they do so is by having dark buildings with infrared lights. This helps simulate nighttime, allowing the nocturnal animals to thrive while their human caretakers are around.

"Their night is our day and because of the environmental control systems we have in zoos now, they don't seem to know the difference," Peter said.

Zoos will also often have signs telling visitors not to tap on the glass to help nocturnal animals be comfortable.

"If you have animals that weren't supposed to be awake during the day, it would be so stressful for them to be exposed to these people going by," Peter said. "Instead, you get to see a natural life cycle with them in sort of a reversed life cycle."



How humans disrupt nocturnal animals

Since humans are a diurnal species, our daytime and nighttime activities can inadvertently affect the routines of nocturnal species. Loud noises, lights and traffic into their habitat alters their natural patterns, so nocturnal animals must adjust their way of life.

"The solution is to allow more habitat for them to move to, rather than trying to break up their habitat so they don't have spaces to escape to," Peter said. "I think we're getting better by leaving wildlife corridors so they can move and migrate to other areas, as well as find a mate and food, and escape the noise of human development."

[Learn how Los Angeles is building wildlife crossings to save cougars by expanding their habitat.](#)

You can help aid nocturnal and diurnal animals in your area by turning your backyard into a wildlife habitat.

"Do a little research and find out what wildlife uses for shelter and food," Peter said. "Turn your backyard into all native, indigenous species to contribute to habitat."

[Learn how to make your backyard a great habitat for wildlife.](#)

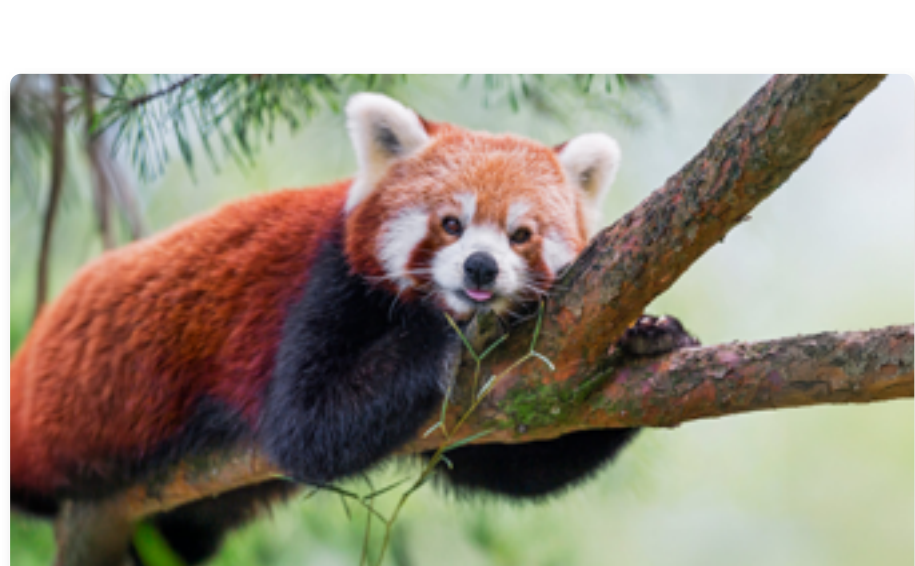


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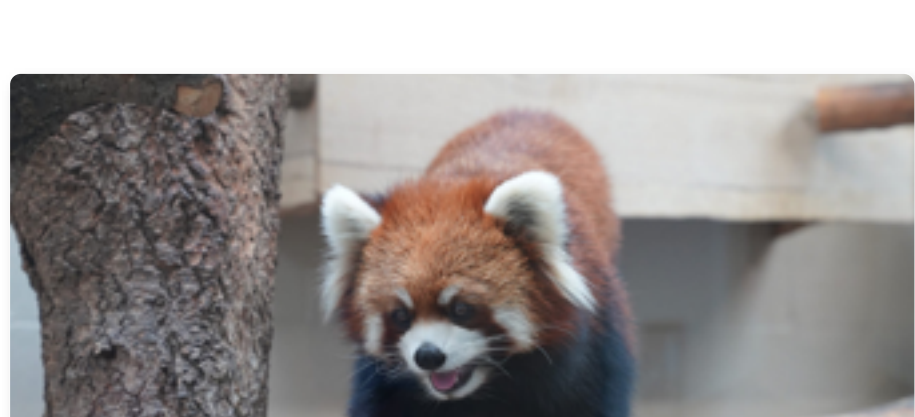
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